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ABSTRACT

This report provides an analysis of the activities being conducted by 25 federally-funded projects across the country that focus on issues related to paraeducators of students with disabilities. A definition of paraprofessionals/paraeducators is offered with a discussion of their increasing role in the education of students with disabilities in both general and special education settings. Analysis of the projects finds the following common issues being addressed: (1) recruitment of and outreach to paraeducators representing minority and diverse ethnic groups; (2) staff development for paraeducators leading to certification or Associate degree; (3) Bachelor's degree programs for currently or recently employed paraeducators; (4) inservice staff development for paraeducators not leading to certification or degree; (5) meeting the needs of low incidence disabilities; and (6) preservice staff development not leading to certification or a degree. A chart lists projects by state and issues the projects are addressing. (DB)

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ED 426 551

Quick Turn Around Forum. Issue: Paraeducators.

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Quick Turn Around Forum

QTA - a brief analysis of a critical issue in special education

Issue: Paraeducators **Date: November 1998**

Purpose

This brief report provides an analysis of the activities being conducted by 25 federally-funded projects across the country that focus on issues related to paraeducators. A chart on the final page of this report summarizes the information gathered for this analysis.

Background

Historically, paraeducators, also known as *paraprofessionals, teacher aides, teacher assistants, instructional assistants,* and *instructional aides,* performed primarily clerical type duties. Today, however, the roles of paraeducators are as diverse as the titles used to describe them.

The National Resource Center (NRC) for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services at City University of New York describes paraprofessionals/paraeducators as employees whose positions are: (1) *either instructional in nature or who provide other direct services to children, youth, and/or their parents; and* (2) *who work under the direction of teachers or other professional practitioners who are responsible for determining educational needs for individual and groups of students, designing and implementing programs and services, and assessing student performance and progress* (Pickett, 1997a).

The NRC promotes use of the term *paraeducators* when referring to these employees because this term conveys specialization of training and status in the education field, similar to the terms *paralegal* and *paramedic* in their respective fields.

The roles and responsibilities of paraeducators have expanded as the educational process and legislation have changed over the past 40 years. In the 1950's, paraeducators were used to address post-war teacher shortages. During the 60's and 70's, social, political and institutional change spurred federal legislation which focused on educational reform. Initiatives such as Head Start and Title I extended educational programs to educationally and economically disadvantaged children and youth with disabilities (Pickett, 1997b). These programs relied heavily upon the services of paraeducators. The passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) in 1975 further increased the need for paraeducators in order to provide individualized services for students with disabilities.

Paraeducators work with children and youth with disabilities in general, as well as special education settings. They have become an essential component of the educational process (Hilton & Gerlach, 1997), and handle a variety of tasks, including, but not limited to, providing direct supervision of students, assisting teachers with preparation and delivery of instruction, and maintaining classroom equipment and organization.

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The 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (P.L. 105-17) put paraeducators into Federal legislation for the first time. In the section of this law that addresses personnel standards, it states: "paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised...to assist in the provision of special education and related services to children with disabilities" [20 U.S.C. Sec.1412 (a)(15)(B)(iii)]. The law also refers to a comprehensive system of personnel development that includes "training of paraprofessionals" [20 U.S.C. Sec.1435 (a)(8)].

In spite of the critical roles paraeducators have played over the years and reference in recent legislation, job descriptions for paraeducators often fail to reflect adequately the specific skills and training necessary. Recently, Hilton & Gerlach (1997) found that many states and districts do not have laws, regulations, standards or guidelines that prevent paraeducators from being used inappropriately, and French & Pickett (1997) found the existence of state credentialing systems rare.

The absence of clearly defined job duties, identified standards, comprehensive training opportunities and credentialing requirements for paraeducators impacts upon the quality and delivery of education for children and youth with disabilities, and makes the supervision of paraeducators by licensed professionals a more challenging task.

Analysis of Federally-Funded Projects

In order to address the paraeducator issues described, a variety of projects have been initiated over the years by state education agencies, community colleges and institutions of higher education. This document describes a subset of such projects that are currently funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

Twenty-eight (28) project abstracts, all including descriptions of activities for paraeducators, were reviewed by Project FORUM at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). These abstracts were from projects in 15 states (AZ, CA, CO, FL, HI, MT, NJ, NM, NY, PA, SD, TN, TX, UT, VT). Based on this review, the following coding scheme was developed to reflect types of activities for paraeducators.

A	Preservice staff development for paraeducators not leading to certification or degree
B	Inservice staff development for paraeducators not leading to certification or degree
C	Staff development for paraeducators leading to certification or Associate degree
D	Bachelor's degree program for currently or recently employed paraeducators
E	Focus on paraeducators from minority racial/ethnic groups
F	Focus on low incidence disabilities
G	Other unique characteristics

One or more codes were assigned to each project. To ensure the accuracy of the information, each project director or coordinator was asked to review and verify the codes assigned to his/her project. Through this process, three projects from the original list were excluded because they are not currently conducting activities involving paraeducators. The following summary reflects information on 25 projects.

Summary of Project Activities

Recruitment of and outreach to paraeducators representing minority and diverse ethnic groups is an element of 64 percent of the projects reviewed. These projects emphasize the importance of

representing the community's ethnic composition in the school workforce in order to recognize, respect, and incorporate cultural factors into the curriculum and environment. Project examples include:

- The Rural Special Education Project at Northern Arizona University prepares special educators to serve in rural and remote areas, and reservation sites. The project goal is for one half of the special educators to be from the Navajo tribe and currently employed as paraeducators.

- The Career Ladder Program at the University of Colorado focuses on paraeducators who are interested in bilingual special education. Bilingual paraeducators bridge the gap between special and bilingual education.

Staff development for paraeducators leading to certification or Associate degree was identified as a component of 52 percent of the projects. These options are provided to paraeducators who are not interested in pursuing teacher certification, but want an opportunity to enhance their skills and knowledge. Project examples include:

- Medgar Evers College offers dual New York State paraeducator certification in general elementary and special education.

- The Washington County Family Center Project in Vermont utilizes two-way audio and video interactive television to offer participants throughout the state the opportunity to receive the nationally-recognized Child Development Associate credential.

Thirty-six percent (36%) of the projects reviewed provide a ***Bachelor's degree program for currently or recently employed paraeducators***. These projects address the shortage of special education teachers by tapping the pool of paraeducators. Project examples include:

- The University of South Florida's project for paraeducators in Polk County incorporates computer technology and televised classes. The curriculum includes inclusion practices, transition planning, and addressing the needs of rural communities.

- Kean College of New Jersey developed an undergraduate program for paraeducators that includes financial support, college and cooperating teacher mentors, counseling, and peer supports.

Inservice staff development for paraeducators <u>not</u> leading to certification or degree was identified as a component of 32 percent of the projects. Although inservice staff development is generally required of certified educators, paraeducators do not always have equal access to these necessary and invaluable experiences. Project examples include:

- Project Na'nitin in New Mexico provides training modules containing references and resource materials, case studies, hands-on activities and visual support materials. The activities are intended to maximize the learning potential of Navajo paraeducators by combining visual, contextual and bilingual approaches. Additionally, a "trainer of trainers" model is used so that project participants acquire competencies to train their fellow co-workers.

- The Special Education and Early Development (SEED) at the University of New Mexico uses a "problem-based learning" approach for inservice staff development. This approach promotes the participant's investment in the learning process by emphasizing real life situations that the

paraeducator might encounter during employment.

Sixteen percent of the projects reviewed incorporated activities related to ***low incidence disabilities***. Project examples include:

- The Paraprofessional Teacher Training Project at the University of Colorado established a bilingual special education Associate degree program with a focus on issues related to students with low incidence disabilities.

- Utah State University includes a course on "critical health issues" in order to identify and address issues related to low incidence disability populations.

Preservice staff development <u>not</u> leading to certification or a degree is a component of 12 percent of the projects reviewed. The intent of such staff development is to better prepare individuals to assume their new roles as paraeducators. Project examples include:

- California State University's project uses course work and field experiences to prepare paraeducators to more effectively work with children and youth with disabilities. The project utilizes competency-based career portfolios to monitor and evaluate the participants' progress and experiences.

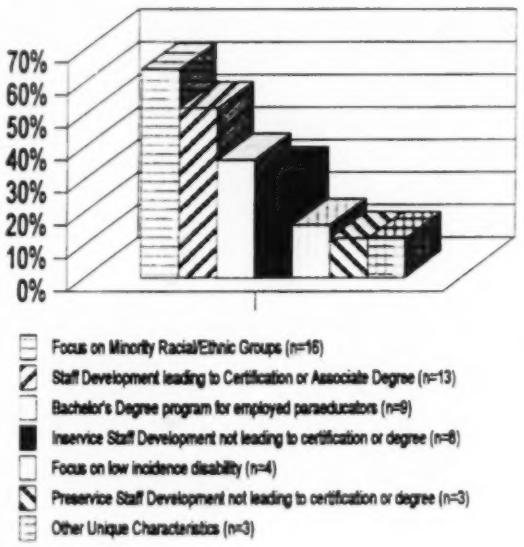
- Medgar Evers College in New York established a partnership with the Transition Services Training Program at California State University-Long Beach and the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services in order to develop, produce and evaluate a competency-based preservice training program.

Twelve percent of the projects reviewed had ***other unique components***. For example:

- Research Foundation/City University of New York is developing guidelines for paraeducator roles; parameters for paraeducator responsibilities in the delivery of instruction and other direct services; and standards for paraeducator preparation and supervision. The national advisory panel consists of representatives from state and local education agencies, institutions of higher education, unions, and professional associations, as well as paraeducators, parents, and other stakeholders.

- Utah State University's project focuses on teachers who supervise paraeducators. This project plans to develop, evaluate and disseminate video-assisted training programs to assist teachers in the supervision, utilization and evaluation of paraeducators.

Summary of Project Activities *


70%
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Focus on Minority Racial/Ethnic Groups (n=16)
Staff Development leading to Certification or Associate Degree (n=13)
Bachelor's Degree program for employed paraeducators (n=9)
Inservice Staff Development not leading to certification or degree (n=8)
Focus on low incidence disability (n=4)
Preservice Staff Development not leading to certification or degree (n=3)
Other Unique Characteristics (n=3)

* Each of the 25 projects was assigned one or more activity codes.

Concluding Remarks

Paraeducators have become a critical component of our educational system. They provide invaluable services by assisting supervising educators as well as working directly with children and youth with disabilities. Over the past 40 years, the duties and roles of paraeducators have changed drastically. These changes have occurred as a result of social, political and philosophical shifts related to education.

In order for paraeducators to adequately perform their varied responsibilities, preservice and inservice staff development opportunities must encompass and reflect the competencies required of the position. This brief analysis describes only a sample of projects and activities that support paraeducators in their crucial roles.

It is important to note that the Federally-funded projects described in this document are not the only projects in place to address the critical issues related to paraeducators. There are a number of state-level efforts enhancing the roles and skills of paraeducators, and some states have been addressing these issues for many years. State efforts are supported by various funds, including discretionary monies. For information about some of the state projects and initiatives related to paraeducators contact:

Colorado -	Sue Chandler (303) 866-6883
Kansas -	Carol Dermyer (785) 291-3097
Minnesota -	Barbara Jo Stahl (612) 296-5605
Rhode Island -	Doris Anselmo (401) 222-4600 ex. 2252
Washington -	Joan Matheson (253) 946-4697
Utah -	Marilyn Likins (801) 273-1843

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State	Title of Project	Category
AZ - Northern Arizona University	Rural Special Education Project (RSEP)	D,E
CA - California State University	Training Paraprofessionals In Transition Services	A,D,E
*CA - San Jose State University	The Full Option for the Utilization of Social Skills (FOCUS)	B
CO - University of Colorado	Career Ladder SPED Paraprofessional Teacher Training Program	C,E
CO - University of Colorado	Inclusive Secondary SPED Preparation Project	B,C,F
CO - University of Colorado at Boulder	Paraprofessional Teacher Training Project - A.A. Degree Program	C,E,F
FL - University of South Florida	Use/Polk County Collaborative Teacher Preparation Prog.	D,E
HI - University of Hawaii	Kakao'o 'la Na Lei	A,B,E
MT - Salish Kootenai College	Minority Personnel Preparation Project	C,E
MT - Stone Mountain College	Minority Institutions Teacher Training Program	C,D,E,G
NJ - Kean College	Urban Special Education Teacher Preparation Project	D,E
NM - University of New Mexico	SEED Inclusion Training Project	B,C
NM - University of New Mexico	Project Na'nitin	B,E
NY - City University of New York (CUNY)	Medgar Evers College Special Education Teacher Training	C,D,E,F
NY - City University of New York (CUNY)	Preparing Paraeducators to work with Children & Youth who have Special Education Needs including Limited English Proficiency	A,B,E
NY - Buffalo State College	Early Intervention Recruiting Minorities/Preparing Paraprofessionals & Special Educators	C,D,E
*NY - Syracuse University	The Inclusive Early Childhood Teachers Education Proj	C,E
NY - Research Foundation/City University of New York	Teacher and Paraprofessional Teams: Strategies for Building Them & Sustaining Them	G
PA - Lehigh Carbon Community College	Early Childhood Personnel Preparation Project	C
SD - Sinte Gleska University	Preparation of Lakota Teachers & Paraprofessionals as SPED Teachers	C,D,E
TN - East Tennessee State University	Project TIES (Towards Inclusion in Early Education)	B
TX - Our Lady Of the Lake University	Special Educators & Paraprofessionals: A Career Advancement Model	D,E
UT - Utah State Education Agency	A State Wide Telecommunications Based Training Program for Instructional Assistants	B,C,F
UT - Utah State University	Towards Effective Supervision & Utilization of Paraprofessionals by Teachers: Development & Evaluation of a Video-Assisted Training Program	G
VT - Washington County Family Center	Early Childhood Personnel Preparation Project	C

* Coding based on published abstract. Did not receive verification of codes from project.

Code	Description
A	Preservice staff development for paraprofessionals not leading to certification or degree
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